

Title: **Intriguing**

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Chapter 1: Chapter 1

Gaius cleared his throat as pointedly as he could, sending a reassuring smile in return for the curious looks a few people nearby threw at him. Usually, when someone cleared their throat in such a way, they were trying to get someone's attention. That he was rebuffing theirs probably seemed very odd. Especially because of how strangely he had to have been acting, from their perspective.

His food lay mostly untouched on the tray in front of

him, and even before he'd sat down he'd pulled out one of the other chairs around the table, the way you did if you were on a date, (though he was alone) before sitting on the opposite side of the small table built for three.

Any other day and he probably would have been at least disgruntled with the way people looked at him, (Like he was crazy) but at that moment he could honestly say he didn't give a frak what they thought, because his thoughts were far more preoccupied with the tall blonde woman who sat across from him, who wasn't paying any attention to him at all.

It was irritating, to say the least.

There was nothing more humiliating than having a figment of your own imagination ignore you.

Gaius had never considered himself a needy person, but he was starting to feel a bit miffed at his companion's continued ignorance of his existence. It had been going on all day, and though he supposed that it was just his due, he was starting to get sick of

being on the receiving end of the cold shoulder.

But no, it wasn't even that. The cold shoulder would at least be an acknowledgment of his existence. This was worse. She wasn't consciously ignoring him, she was just...distracted.

If he'd had any pride left, his ego would have been sorely bruised. As it was...

He lifted his gaze to the far end of the mess hall where his companion's gaze was transfixed, trying to figure out what had her so...distracted.

Which was hardly the right word, when you got right down to it, was it? Mesmerized would be better. Fascinated, maybe. Enthralled? Definitely.

"You know," He said conversationally, picking up his fork and twirling it between his fingers as a recurring thought popped into his head for perhaps the thousandth time, "I still don't even know your name."

That finally got her attention. Which was surprising.

He'd said a lot less innocent things in an attempt to shock her from her reverie, and none of them had worked. He'd even dared to try insults at one point. She hadn't even batted an eye. But now she turned to him, lifting her head off of the hand she'd had it propped up on, her expression confused. "What?"

"I know, odd, isn't it?" He said, purposefully averting his gaze from hers. So what if it was petty? She'd been ignoring him for hours. Let her fight for his attention now. "We've known each other for, how long now?" His brow furrowed of its own accord. He honestly couldn't remember. It seemed like forever. Surely it hadn't really been just a few days since the world had ended? "You know everything there is to know about me, and I don't even know your name. Or if you have one, for that matter." Another thinly veiled insult, just to see how she would react now that she was paying attention.

Her eyes narrowed, and she swiveled around in the chair so that she was facing him completely. He allowed himself a small smirk of triumph, before his curiosity won over the victory of recapturing her

undivided attention. "You *do* have a name, don't you?"

If, and that was a big if, she was, in fact, an entity separate from his own consciousness, and not simply a delusion born from his traumatized and shattered psyche, then the odds were rather heavily stacked that she *did* have a name that she had, up until this point, refused to reveal to him, for one reason or another.

She narrowed her eyes, her lips pursing into a thin line that he knew meant she was angry at him.

Refusing to back down, (and delighted that her focus was once more on him, where it rightly belonged) he arched one eyebrow in silent challenge.

She sighed, shot one more (and was that wistfulness he detected?) glance toward the far end of the mess hall, and tilted her head to the side slightly, one hand posed on her chin. "I don't know." She said softly.

That threw him for a loop. His eyebrows shot up, and he stared at her in a mixture of confusion and dread.

If she didn't have a name because *he* didn't know what her name was, then that meant that he was probably completely frakking insane.

"Oh," He said, rolling his eyes, "Great. Good to know you really *are* just a figment of my imagination then." He wasn't sure if the derision in his voice was another attempt to insult her, or if it was at the revelation that he was probably even more insane than usual. But then again, things like this, after all he'd been through, they weren't unheard of.

There was obviously something wrong with him, but that didn't mean he was *crazy*...

...Did it?

The woman slammed her hands down against the table suddenly, forcing him to look up at her, startled by the sudden reaction after all of her silence. "I *am* real." She snapped when he met her eyes. She was glaring at him now, her arms tensed as she folded them across her chest, her skin shockingly pale against the bright red of her dress. "Why do you

continue to doubt me? After all I've *done* for you?"

Was that *hurt* he detected in her voice? No, no, it definitely was. She was *hurt*. And angry. His mind scrambled for something to say, *anything* to say, shocked out of his wits at the *emotion* that she was showing. In all the time—days, weeks, months...how long had it been?—that he'd known her, she'd never shown anything in regards to emotion other than anger or passionate...well...*intimacy*. He wasn't really sure that her devotion to her 'one true god' could count as an emotion or not.

This was the first time he'd ever seen her genuinely upset, and his confusion tied the words on his tongue into knots.

Not even aware of it, he was still spinning the fork in his fingers, and with a twitch of her mouth as though she wanted to bear her teeth at him in a feral snarl, one of her hands flashed out and smacked it from his shocked fingers with startling ferocity.

The plastic utensil flipped end-over-end through the

air, and landed beneath the chair of a marine at the table behind them. Gaius watched its flight with a slack jaw, and stared at it for a few moments as it lay still on the floor. The marine—something Hale or other—hadn't noticed anything, and was still conversing quietly with her companions at the table. No one else at the table had noticed either, which left him with his only fork now lying on the ground, and out of reach.

His anger flared suddenly, and he threw his hands into the air, no longer caring whether or not he was looked at strangely. "Well that's just great!" He hissed, only lowering his voice so as not to disturb the people around him, suddenly remembering that other people had problems of their own, and they didn't need to be burdened with his, "Thanks, ever so much for *that*! You know what? You know what?" He glared right back at her, matching her hard gaze strength for strength, "Why don't *you* get it for me? Since you're a *real* person, why don't *you* pick it up, huh? Huh?" Whatever good mood her attention had brought him was now gone, evaporated under her unrelenting

glare.

Like a whisper of danger, her movements were slow and controlled as she leaned forward over the table, putting herself just the shortest bit closer than she had been before so that he could smell the earthy aura that always seemed to float around her like wings. He'd never been one much for nature himself, but just the *scent* of her had him feeling the coarse warmth of dirt beneath his bare feet, his toes digging down into it even as a breeze that brought with it the shockingly bright green of leaves and golden slants of sun beams dancing with innumerable motes of dust drifted past him. He could feel the heat of the air hanging blessedly over him like a second skin, and could see the shadows that flitted over him from birds singing in the branches above. In a single breath of her air, the cafeteria disappeared, and he was swept away into a world ancient beyond his understanding.

Her voice, low and angry, broke him out of his trance. "It doesn't *work* like that!" She hissed, glaring at him as though he'd asked her to do the impossible, and then laughed when she failed.

In a way, part of his mind reminded him, wary of making her too angry, he *had*.

But he didn't care. "You just said you were real!" He hissed back, leaning forward to match her pose, his arms touching the sides of his tray as he put some of his weight on them, "Real people, can *pick up the forks they throw on the ground!*" For a moment, he started to wonder how she had even managed to slap it out of his hands in the first place, but the anger stirring inside him was enough that he didn't want to give an inch. He shoved the thoughts aside. He would deal with them later. If they even *mattered* later.

"I've already told you!" She snarled, sitting back up so that her shoulders were squared and her arms crossed over her chest, "I *only exist inside your mind!*"

And once again, the words died on his tongue. Did she even *realize* what she'd just said?

He had to resist the urge to rip his hair from his scalp in a sudden fit of...he wasn't even sure what. "That

makes literally no sense." He whispered. His voice came out hoarse with stress he couldn't even begin to articulate.

He'd accepted that he was insane. Months ago-no, wait, hadn't it only been a few days? Or weeks? How long ago had he started seeing her?-Too many other things had been happening for him to have time for a complete mental breakdown.

"That doesn't make any sense at all!" She couldn't be real *and* only exist inside his mind. That was impossible, it defied all logic. Which meant that either *she was lying*, or *he was insane*.

He blinked, or lost focus, or maybe the lights in the cafeteria flickered. He didn't know. All he knew was that one moment she was sitting across the small table from him, fuming with rage, and the next, she was gone.

He recoiled in surprise, his heart leaping in his chest as the sudden jolt of shock. Disappearing like that was almost as bad as her sudden appearances. He

always thought that he was braced for it, always told himself that *this time* he wouldn't be surprised. But she would always appear when he least expected it, no matter how hard he tried to get used to it.

Looking around wildly in the hope that she was still in the room - - she couldn't just leave now, not when he had so many questions that needed answers, not when he had *just* gotten her attention, not when he was still so angry and confused - - he quickly spotted her over a dozen tables away, at the far end of the mess hall.

Her shockingly red dress stood out like a sore thumb amidst the dark uniforms of the soldiers, and the dull clothes of the few civilians that were aboard the Battlestar.

She was weaving through the crowded tables as though she were dancing, heading toward the far wall. Why she didn't just *appear* at her destination like she'd disappeared from her chair, Gaius couldn't fathom.

He suddenly realized that she was headed in the direction she had been so distracted by before he managed to get her talking, and felt his curiosity quickly overwhelm his anger and fear.

What was she doing over there?

He thought about getting up and following her over, and after a moment of hesitation, decided that he had nothing to lose.

He stood up, and abandoned his lonely table.

The mess hall was loud with the thrum of a crowd, but it all seemed to grow distant the closer he got to the mysterious woman who haunted the halls of his mind. She had stopped at the farthest table, where a lone figure sat, and was hovering a few feet away, looking hesitant, and almost *shy*.

Gaius increased his pace, something like fear sharpening a knife inside his throat.

The person at the table had their back to the room,

and his eyes quickly scanned over their form. It was probably a woman, he realized quickly as he drew ever closer, her arms built with lean muscles and hair that was cut military-short.

The woman was standing a few feet away from the table, her gaze locked earnestly onto the woman sitting there, her hands clasped *nervously* in front of her stomach.

"Who is she?" She whispered, speaking to him as though their earlier conversation hadn't happened, speaking in that reverent voice she only reserved for lectures on God's love. "Who is she, Gaius?"

It was a woman then, definitely. Gaius crept closer, suddenly once more excruciatingly aware of how strange he probably looked, sneaking up behind someone in the crowded cafeteria.

"E-excuse me," He said, trying to contain his sudden nervousness, lifting one hand to give a small, fruitless wave. The woman didn't look up, he wasn't speaking loudly enough.

He moved closer, and slightly to the side, trying to peer closer at the woman's face so he could see who she was. He suddenly realized that she didn't have any food with her, but had her head bowed over her hands, her eyes closed, and her mouth moving silently.

He stepped back, suddenly feeling like an unwelcome guest. Whoever she was, she was praying.

As though urged on by his hesitation, his hallucination-or whatever she was-moved forward suddenly, and sat down in the chair next to the praying woman, leaning over so that she was encroaching in her personal space, tilting her head so that she was staring up at the woman's face.

"She's beautiful..." She whispered, sounding like she hadn't even meant to say the words out loud.

She hesitated for a moment, looking torn, then slowly, carefully placed her hands over the woman's.

Gaius lifted a hand to stop her, almost said *don't*,

before he remembered that he was the only one who could see or hear or touch her.

Because she only existed inside his head.

The praying woman didn't jump, or flinch, or hesitate, or give any sign that she could feel the hands that were now wrapped gently around her own. Gaius wasn't sure why he was expecting anything different.

The woman just continued to stare at the other woman's face for a few moments, her expression filled with awe. And then, blinking suddenly as though something had fallen into her eye, she began to relax, and then slowly, slowly, closed her eyes, and bowed her head, mirroring the other woman exactly.

When Gaius realized what she was doing, he took a step backward, confused and alarmed. *She* was praying now, too. She was praying with a member of the Colonial Fleet, who was more than likely *not* a monotheist.

Where had all her disdain for worshipping more than

just the One True God disappeared to?

Gaius took another step backward, the sudden urge to *join them* striking him from nowhere. He wanted to sit next to the praying woman, and clasp her hands as the woman in red had, and bow his head and pray with her. He wanted to project this thoughts out into the deep expanse of stars, and beg for the answer to his questions. Why was he here? Why had all of these horrible things happened to him? Why had all these horrible things happened to *them*? What could he do to change his - - their - - fate?

He took another step backward, confused and alarmed. He didn't even know this woman, and he sure as frak didn't believe in the gods, or God, or whatever it was foolish other people wanted to worship. There was no power in this universe greater than theirs, and no amount of praying or religious propaganda was going to convince him otherwise.

Monotheists were just as sure that *they* were right as the polytheists were. But their two views were completely and utterly opposed, and they couldn't

both be right. He'd tried explaining this to so many people, but they never listened. If *your* religion was right, then every single other religion ever to exist had been *wrong*.

And yet...he could barely contain the urge to ask the woman if he could sit next to her. He wanted to ask who she was praying to, what she was praying *for*. He wanted to ask her to teach him the words of reverence he knew were falling from her silent lips.

But that would be...

He didn't even have a good enough word for it. Hypocritical didn't cover it.

Defying his very nature was more like it.

Gaius looked at the two praying women, and shook his head. He couldn't do it, and he wouldn't. Prayer wasn't for him, passively waiting for things to fall into his lap wasn't for him.

He took one last step backwards, and then turned

around, pointing his feet toward the door on the far wall.

The woman in red could stay here as long as she wanted, or at least, as long as she could. He didn't know if there was a limit to the distance she could travel from him, but he didn't really feel like expending the effort to find out. She could pray if she wanted to, but he had other things that needed attending to.

He had research he needed to get back to, and Cylons to find.